



Near South Proposal Community Meeting #1:
Proposed Reassignment Boundary Change of National Teachers Academy
Tuesday, January 9, 2018
Illinois Institute of Technology: Hermann Hall Auditorium
6:00-8:00pm

CPS Staff in Attendance

Estefany Alvarez, Onshelle Blackmon, Emily Bolton, Shani Boone, Judy Camacho, Zeb Everette, Lori Fuentes, Greg Gray, Carl Hurdlik, Keda Jeter, Chip Johnson, Kareem Pender, Nilufar Rezai, Luis Rodriguez, Lauro Roman, Morris Ross, Mark Scott, Cynthia Smiley, Tiffany Taylor, Thyatiria Towns

CPS Presentation 6:00-6:20pm

Chip Johnson, Chief of FACE2, as the facilitator and presenter of the meeting opened by welcoming NTA, South Loop, Drake, and Chinatown communities. He acknowledged the presence of Alderman Pat Dowell (3rd Ward), Alderman Patrick Thomson (11th Ward), representatives from ODLSS, STLS, and Talent, and the Principals in the audience. He encouraged all to provide their comments via transitions@cps.edu in addition to the notecards distributed at the door. He invited those who were interested to meet with the ODLSS, STLS, and Talent reps at the end of the meeting if they had questions for those offices. He went through meeting logistics. He described the legal process leading to board vote on the proposal and how engagement and feedback was solicited over the past 6 months.

Mr. Johnson provided an overview of the proposed school action which involves high school conversion of NTA and NTA student transition. The proposed conversion timeline will begin in SY 2019-20 and be completed in SY 2024-25. NTA students will be given the choice of transitioning to the new south loop elementary school on 16th and Dearborn. Furthermore, NTA students will have a guaranteed seat at the HS regardless of where they live. Provided a detailed proposal of NTA student transitions via various student groups: Pre-K, K, 1-3, 4-8, and regional gifted classes of K, 1-3, 4-8. The proposal also entails the re-assignment of boundaries for South Loop elementary. It will expand to include NTA's current boundary for certain grades over time.

CPS has budgeted 3.5M to support the transition of NTA students through graduation. Supports include community building and culture integration, the creation of a joint

Culture and Climate team from both NTA and South Loop, Principal and School-Based transition coordinators, restorative practices, staff professional development and training, and shuttle buses for NTA students transitioning to South Loop.

The proposal also outlines the HS neighborhood boundaries to include the boundaries of the following elementary schools: Drake, Haines, Healy, NTA, South Loop, and Ward. There will also be a “preference boundary” to encompass the boundaries of Armour, Holden, and Pershing. Across the district, 22% of HS students attend neighborhood school. If too few students from the preference boundary want to attend, then remaining seats are open to the rest of the city.

Currently there are 2,037 HS students living in both the neighborhood and preference boundaries. The estimated capacity of the NTA building is between 1000-1200 students. Following a boundary analysis, CPS does not expect more than 50% of the 2,037 students to enroll in the new neighborhood HS.

Before opening the floor for public comment, Mr. Johnson went through guidelines for a respectful meeting, reminding the audience to observe silence so the stenographer and note-taker would be able to capture all the comments made. He also informed the community about the actions of the timekeeper and stated that questions at this meeting would not be answered. He reminded the audience to go to the CPS website for more information about Transition plans: cps.edu/transitions. He also invited the public officials the opportunity to speak first.

Public Comments 6:20-8:00pm

D.B.: NTA student. Main point is that it's not ok to close a +1 school. He made 3 additional comments: “My 4 years have been fun and I’ve always felt safe and protected.” “It’s upsetting to see the school close even though I’ll be graduating. My brothers depended on coming.” “We have wonderful teachers and a wonderful Principal and AP so I would hate to see it be closed down.”

James Miller: South Loop resident. He stated that he chose a HS plan, just not this one because it’s based on lies. He stated that there are not enough seats to accommodate the graduates. He also didn’t believe that the proposed integration plan or budget was sufficient to address the various student and building needs.

John Pointer: NTA staff/parent. He recommended that the new building on 16th and Dearborn be used as a high school and that NTA welcome South Loop students. He saw some of the best kids and administrators come out of NTA which is a family, so he will fight to keep it open.

Ben Chianma: NTA and South Loop parent. First question that needs to be asked at every one of these meetings is “What are we sacrificing NTA for?” The building can only accommodate 500 kids per class/per grade level. Besides the neighborhood elementary schools, have to also consider all the private schools in South Loop that might feed into a neighborhood HS. He concluded by asking the 11th ward alderman why he was supporting this.

Jesse Sharkey: VP of Chicago Teacher’s Union. He is opposed to this plan to phase out and close NTA because it is ill-conceived and undermines the academic success of a neighborhood school---this defies racial justice. CPS has used low test scores/poorest schools as a justification for closing schools, and now they are closing a high-performing school to provide a building for a gentrified neighborhood. So CPS has essentially moved from using the value of a test score to the value of a condominium as criteria. He entreated the audience to ask CEO and Janice Jackson to vote no on this plan.

Pastor Earl Grandberry: South Loop resident for 36 years. He told the audience not to think with their emotions, stop manipulating the children, and see that this plan will help the children.

J.J.: NTA student. Main point is she didn’t want her school taken away. Other comments she made: “We are 1+ school and I have learned reading, math, science.” “I love the way my classmates are nice.” “My teacher taught me a lot of things and I don’t want that to go away.”

Annetta Jones: NTA parent. Family came from a previously displaced school. Her children have gone from earning Ds/Fs to now As/Bs. She has never seen such an involved principal and caring teachers and proclaimed NTA as the best school in the South Loop.

Matsu Marty: NTA and South Loop parent. NTA is transforming the lives of many blacks and inspiring black youth to be future leaders. NTA is 75% black and 75% economically disadvantaged. CPS says it will provide South Loop families high quality education because Phillips is not high quality for white families. To do this, CPS is eliminating a school that is igniting future black leaders in a hyper segregated city that also divides the have and have nots. It is the community that chooses and decides, not CPS.

L.P.: NTA student. She is an honor roll student and said that if she and her sister go to different schools her mom won't have enough money to get the two of them to school.

David Wu: CBCAC (Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community) member. Chinatown supports the boundary as it serves a huge area that hasn't had its own HS. Building a diverse school is not easy.

Unnamed: Former resident of Harold Ickes homes. The NTA park district serves seniors who use the pool so with the HS, that won't be possible. Where will they go?

Joy Clendenning: Raise your hand IL for public education and CPS parent. CPS has used questionable measures to close schools based on flawed formulas and she objects to these metrics. CPS has decided to toss their own rules and close a high performing predominantly African American school. Asked Bridgeport parents not to "buy into these hunger games because black students matter."

Nadiyah Mohajir: NTA parent of 4th and KDG. Justice and community are at the foundation of NTA's practices. Schools like NTA should be highlighted, replicated, and improved. CPS' decision to dismantle a thriving community school because of the belief that there is no viable HS option is also an insult to Phillips and Dunbar. "Would we be standing here tonight if NTA was a majority white school?"

Elisabeth Greer: NTA parent. Mr. Castelaz was able to open up a teacher position and open a gifted classroom of 21 students who will remain a cohort until they graduate from the 8th grade. CPS is implementing a racist plan that is destroying the high achieving community. In 2018, CPS is turning back the clock 60 years.

Amy Roan: NTA teacher. CPS plan is not feasible and disrespects families. In 1994 observed the tunnel controversy in Haynes and in the 2000's has watched the boundaries at South Loop elementary change when it was politically convenient. Similarly, she watched South Loop overcrowd and then NTA take on the gifted program as a result. Despite all these transitions, NTA is a level 1+ school.

Raquel Don, Parent at James Ward and LSC member. 4th generation from Bridgeport. Believes that there are enough students and diversity in Bridgeport alone to make a great high school.

Eli Diaz: NTA parent. Believes that an excellent school is closing to line somebody's pocket. Our problems originate with career alderman who truly believe that when their interests are served, Chicago is served.

Tina Feldstein: Prairie Alliance and South Loop resident. She supports the plan, applauds the process and appreciates that everyone has the opportunity to speak. A lot of people have been begging for a neighborhood HS because it's so difficult to get into selective enrollment. Wanted to know how many of the teachers from NTA will also transition?

Speaker: NTA parent of a 3rd grader. Asking why CPS can't get a plan that is equal for everyone and leave NTA out of it? She moved from Englewood to give her child better opportunities and will have to move again. Her son is anxious about the school closing. The school is unique: onsite health clinic, they offer drama and swimming classes, school staff will go above and beyond to walk her son to an afterschool program so mom could keep her job.

Dana Metz: 11th ward resident. Wants the boundaries to be extended to include the entire 11th ward. If you drive south of 35th on Halsted, there's an influx of new housing being built. 150 new homes that holds over 200 kids who are currently excluded.

M.C.: NTA student. "We need to keep NTA open. Some teachers will lose their job if we don't keep NTA open. If NTA closes, I may never see them again so please don't turn NTA into a HS."

Salvador Cicero: NTA parent. This proposal has galvanized NTA and turned it into a "true community." NTA is the "jewel of the South Side" and something that CPS is doing right so Mr. Cicero feels they deserve to be treated better than this. It is Level 1+ school with amazing facilities and a diverse student body.

Daiquiri Lewers: South Loop resident. The investment they want to spend on this transition could be used to make Phillips an attractive school. Asked why it is ok to sacrifice NTA and not South Loop? She feels because of the "attitudes of entitlement" that makes South Loop not "expendable." She chose to send her child to NTA over South Loop because she saw our brown babies getting a wonderful education in a beautiful place where they were learning and thriving.

Sabrina Borkins: NTA grandparent. With 5 granddaughters at NTA, she opposes turning it into a HS. When her grandchildren came to NTA, their grades were not good but now it's better because the staff at NTA have been "excellent, working diligently hard, working long hours." She feels it's unfair for the children.

K.P.: NTA 7th grade student. She attended NTA since KDG and feels this proposal will “dismantle a community that has been around a long time.”

T.W.: NTA student. She has been at NTA since 1st grade and feels this proposal is “racist.” She asked “Do you think we are stupid enough to believe this plan is for the better?” She believes South Loop elementary isn’t NTA and it will never be so she said “we’re fighting and we won’t stop”.

Joey Lynn Pinaglia: Bridgeport resident. The proposed high school boundaries are leaving out half of Bridgeport and all of Canaryville. Phillips and Tilden are a level 2 academic probation which puts them in a position to leave their homes or pay for a Catholic education for their 3 children.

Chip Johnson interjected and asked everyone to show respect for the diverse voices. He reminded the audience that they don’t have to agree with the comments, but they have to listen respectfully.

Speaker: He is saddened that this problem which affects us all has turned into a racial issue of mistrust against CPS. He was wondering why this is the only solution where communities are being pitted against each other? He was “deeply impressed by the advocacy of NTA family” and felt that Chinatown has not been able to tell their story effectively. Chinatown has been in Chicago for over 100 years and never had its own high school. He reiterated that nobody should have to fight for a school and pleaded that people not turn against each other.

Wendy Miller: NTA parent. She was wondering if this proposal is the best CPS can do for the future of the families because NTA is a family, not a school. She said that 700 school children will be sacrificed for CPS’s benefit. She described NTA students as being empowered to speak with their own strong, confident voice. They are courageous and leave with integrity. The older students set an example.

Speaker: She opened by asking “Why are we here for this show?” She reiterated that the majority of the community has opposed this plan. She asked CPS “what weight or consideration was given to how the proposal would affect the most vulnerable communities?” She reiterated that the “perception of the achievement of NTA being due to the achievement of the gifted students is a lie.” CPS has not come back and apologized and “admitted that they were wrong.”

Chris Hacker: NTA parent of RGC. He opened by asking “Why are we here especially if it doesn’t appear we are being listened to?” He feels that the numbers don’t make

sense and that it's a political decision and not an education decision. He feels that half of the 2000 students who would be entitled to a seat wouldn't be able to get one. He ended by saying "I'm here to bear witness."

Beth Van Opstal: NTA parent. She has called NTA parents and canvased Long Grove homes and not found one person who supports the plan. She believes that NTA students do better than South Loop students and feels this is not an equitable plan. She is posting video testimonials on the NTA website and reiterated that she doesn't feel like the opposing voices are being listened to.

Erica Clark: Parents for Teachers. She asked what low income black families in Chicago have to do to get justice? She asked to stop these "hunger games" and do what's right for all students. As a former CPS parent, she believes CPS would never have done something like this to the schools her children went to and thus affirms that this is a racist school closing. "NTA has met all the benchmarks and they are being sabotaged."

Shantel Boston: NTA parent. She asks what this is teaching the children: "that no matter how hard you push, there will be someone there to push it back down." She stated that NTA has been a great support system for single mothers and wondering who this is benefiting.

Suda Mansouri: NTA parent. She wonders why the same support that is being proposed for this transition plan can't be placed towards the two high schools that are already in the neighborhood. She immigrated to US 11 years ago and sees this process as a "war without a bomb, making people fight over things that are unnecessary." She praised Principal Castelaz and his team as an example of making a great school and building a family community which will be destroyed with this proposal.

Clyde Cooper: NTA parent. He said that NTA served as a foundation for his brother M.G. who is going to Harvard next year. With this closing, his own children won't have this same opportunity as his brother.

Latasha Watkin: NTA parent. She chose NTA over South Loop for her own children. Feels these meetings are just to check a box. The community is not getting a HS that will accommodate all our students and the proposal is "uprooting a solid community". She asked "where is the academic evidence that shows how these students are going to fare better?" Addressed Alderman Dowell by saying she would expect her support to make sure the "students are taken care of" and addressed CPS by saying "if you are

proposing to bring a change, your motto should be first do no harm.” She is tired of fighting.

Niketa Brar: ED for Chicago United for Equity. She conducted a “racial equity assessment” on this proposal which asks the question: “Who gets the benefit and who bears the burden?” She explained that “if the same ethnic/income black families who have been burdened in the past are being burdened again, then that’s not right.” She invited the audience to attend a meeting on Thursday, January 11 from 5:30-8:00 p.m. at NTA to come to the table and discuss how to fix this plan, to come up with a solution that will work better for all.

Paul Kent: Rush University medical center. He studies health equity with a colleague at Rush, Dr. Ansel. He stated that the biggest risk to health in America is poverty. His group of scientists will look at the data to determine if this is direct institutionalized racism by taking an opportunity away from these students.

NTA parent: She feels that this proposal is turning South Loop elementary into a “frankenschool” with “2000 students spread across 3 buildings.” She said that without data to support this proposal as a quality option, the Level 1+ rating is gone.

Speaker: She read the transition guidelines which stated that community members have to request that a school action be made. The only record NTA families have is an email from Alderman Dowell that called for a meeting with Mayor Emanuel and neither of these people are members from the community. Where did this plan originate? She came to NTA when it was a Level 3 school because she “understood what was happening at that school.” On the PDNA website there was an article posted that said “with NTA being 80% low income, is it any wonder what nobody sends children there?” She feels that was the impetus for this plan.

L.W.: South Loop student. She apologized for what the “school is trying to do.” She stated: “If I had known, I probably would have tried to do something about it.”

Beth Van Opstal: NTA parent. She believes that under the new proposal, grandparents are going to have to walk to 3 different buildings to get their children to school. She asked that public officials keep their websites open for public comment and to stand on the right side of justice.

Chip Johnson invited the community to attend the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 16th from 6:00pm-8:00pm at the 2nd Presbyterian Church located at 1936 S. Michigan. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm.